

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Catholics for Change in Our Church marks first anniversary of PA Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse with call to action

*Now 1000+ Strong, Group Calls for Transparency and Accountability, Support to Victims, and Expanded Roles for Women and Lay Catholics*

**PITTSBURGH, August 14, 2019** — [Catholics for Change in Our Church \(CCOC\)](#), an independent organization of over 1000 concerned, committed Catholics working toward change and affirmation of the laity's rightful role in the Church, today released *Working Together Toward Our Future Church: CCOC Statement on the First Anniversary of the Release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*.

The statement provides historical perspective on the crisis, progress in the past year, and a call for constructive reform.

The [Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report](#) found over 300 Pennsylvania priests were accused of sexually abusing more than 1,000 children, and that Church leadership engaged in ongoing, systemic efforts to conceal these cases and reassign accused priests. Coming four months after the announcement that the 188 current parishes in the six-county Diocese of Pittsburgh would be consolidated into 57 parish clusters and that the majority of pastors and priests would be reassigned, the report's revelations sent shock waves through a faith community that was already wrestling with massive change and upheaval.

"We felt it was important on this first anniversary that the voice of the laity be heard, in addition to the bishop and clergy, and of course the victims and their families," said Kevin Hayes, CCOC chairperson. "With over 1000 members, we know we speak for many, maybe even the majority, of the Catholics who are still active in the Church in Pittsburgh. Most of those who have decided to stay in the Church want change, and they want it soon."

#### **Where we are now: Events of the Past Year**

In September 2018, 200 committed, hurting and outraged Catholics met for an evening of prayer and listening and formed [Catholics for Change in Our Church \(CCOC\)](#). Since then, many more have joined, and the group now numbers over 1000.

Seven Focus Groups were created to further discuss a lay response. They began meeting to define recommended corrections with the goal of revitalizing the Church through healing and restoring trust through transparency. The [CCOC Focus Groups](#) are: Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors and Their Families, Financial Transparency, Addressing Clericalism, Strengthening and Diversifying the Clergy, Pathways to Lay Leadership, Engaging and Empowering Youth, and Lay Oversight of Diocesan Functions.

In 2018, Bishop Zubik held four Listening Sessions across the Diocese. He listened to the pain and anger expressed by victims and those close to them, and also to calls for change. Bishop Zubik later published a Pastoral Letter, [The Church Healing](#). It outlined his five-point plan to address clergy sexual abuse. Several actions in the letter have been completed. Of nine recent appointments to new and existing Diocesan roles, eight are lay people and seven are women. Bishop Zubik and key members of his staff have met with CCOC focus group coordinators three times, with another session planned in September.

### **Looking Forward: Call to Action for Constructive Reform**

Today, Bishop Zubik and the Church face mounting moral, financial, and management challenges. The CCOC Statement recommends a series of actions to move the Church forward. These include substantive changes in the structure and oversight of our Church, such as the inclusion of independent groups like CCOC or communities of religious women in decisions for diocesan advisory council appointments, independent lay oversight of a whistleblower program, and independent lay input into review of the bishop's performance.

The CCOC [Focus Groups](#) have outlined recommendations ranging from independent and lay oversight of diocesan financial functions; to strengthening and consistently implementing structures such as parish pastoral councils and finance councils; to understanding the true opinions of the laity on the role of women in ministry and church governance; to promoting co-responsibility of the laity through appropriate roles in the life and ministry of the parish and the diocese.

"We are the Church. Together. The clergy, the laity, the central diocesan administration," said Gretchen Jezerc, Co-coordinator of the CCOC Pathways to Lay Leadership Focus Group. "The change that's needed will only happen if the laity both demand it and help to do the work to get it done."

### **About CCOC:**

CCOC – Catholics for Change in Our Church – is an independent organization of 1000+ concerned, committed Catholics, based in Pittsburgh, formed to affirm the laity's rightful role of co-responsibility in the Church. The goal of CCOC is to bring about positive changes grounded in working collaboratively with the clergy and having the qualities of transparency, accountability, and competency. The seven focus areas of CCOC are: Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors and Their Families, Financial Transparency, Addressing Clericalism, Strengthening and Diversifying the Clergy, Pathways to Lay Leadership, Engaging and Empowering Youth, and Lay Oversight of Diocesan Functions. For more information and resources or to get involved, please visit [CCOC-pgh.org](http://CCOC-pgh.org).

### **Contact:**

Gretchen Jezerc, Pathways to Lay Leadership Focus Group Coordinator

[gjezerc@gmail.com](mailto:gjezerc@gmail.com)

724-600-6136

Kevin Hayes, CCOC Chairperson

[khayes@hayesdesign.com](mailto:khayes@hayesdesign.com)

412-759-5782

(Note: Kevin is traveling through August 17th; his responses may be delayed.)

John Costantino, Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors & Their Families Focus Group Coordinator

[john\\_costantino@yahoo.com](mailto:john_costantino@yahoo.com)

412-508-1451